



BEGINNER TO INTERMEDIATE

WOMEN'S FOUNDATIONS

PROGRAM

BY: STEPHANIE BUTTERMORE, PHD

A grayscale background image of a woman with long dark hair, wearing a black tank top and light-colored leggings, flexing her right bicep. She is standing in a gym with other people and equipment visible in the background.

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ABOUT THIS PROGRAM

Inside this book is essentially everything I wish I had when I began my fitness journey. There is information in this book that could be useful to someone who has never step foot in a gym but also for those who have been training for years, but have been led down the path of bad advice or misinformation.

You will learn about principles that create the very foundation of lifting in a way that can quite literally, transform your body. You will not only learn how, but also why, with detailed functional anatomy and joint actions outlining the kinesiology behind lifting weights. This will equip you with the knowledge to understand why certain movements target certain muscles, and how to understand basic muscle actions. This program also includes all the essential principles that make up the core of exercise science as well as principles that you shouldn't spend too much

time focusing on, as they are not paramount to your success.

You will find 3 separate 8-week programs included in this document, which cater to fit your busy schedule. There is a 3-day full body program, 4-day lower/upper program and 5-day body-part split program, which all center around building muscle, building strength, improving your physique and of course improving your health. These programs have been designed to incorporate exercises that are fundamental to your lifting career, exercises that extremely important for you to grasp early in your lifting journey as you will perform these exercises even as an advanced lifter. These programs have been written using the most up to date science and 22 scientific papers, which will help you understand the overall principles of exercise and improving body composition.



ABOUT STEPHANIE

Stephanie Buttermore is a PhD who has transitioned from the world of academia for a world of sharing her life and passion for the things she loves. Using her YouTube and social media platforms, she entertains, and most importantly, educates on the scientific principles of training and nutrition, blending her years of reading and writing scientific literature with her passion for exercise and fitness.

EDUCATION:

- BS Micro/Molecular Biology University of Central Florida
- MS Medical Sciences, Women's Health, University of South Florida
- MS Medical Sciences, Pathology & Cell Biology, University of South Florida
- PhD Biomedical Sciences, Pathology & Cell Biology, University of South Florida

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Dr. Buttermore's doctoral research focused primarily on early detection screening markers of ovarian cancer (OC) and the molecular mechanisms driving OC. Through her work, she discovered that a protein called Receptor for Hyaluronan Mediated Motility (RHAMM) was up regulated in OC cell lines, OC tissue and OC patient urine. She demonstrated that RHAMM could be used in conjunction with other screening modalities as a viable early detection urinary screening marker (patent). If you are interested in her work, her dissertation is available to read on her website (StephanieButtermore.com).



LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS & KEY TERMS

ABBREVIATIONS

AMRAP - As many reps as possible

BMD - Bone Mineral Density

CVD - Cardiovascular Disease

DB - Dumbbell

MMC - Mind-Muscle Connection

RIR - Repetitions in Reserve

ROM - Range of Motion

RPE - Rate of Perceived Exertion

LISS - Low Intensity Steady State

KEY TERMS

AMRAP: “As many reps as possible” with good form. Often performed as a test to determine max strength

Concentric: The contracting (“positive”) aspect of the lift

Eccentric: The lowering (“negative”) aspect of the lift

Effort: How hard you are pushing the set relative to failure. Measured with RPE or %1RM

Frequency: How often you directly train a given muscle per 7 days

Hypertrophy: The growth of (muscle) tissue

Intensity: Effort and load

Load: The weight of the external resistance

Periodization: The organization of training over time

Primary exercise: Main heavy compound movements that involve a large muscle mass (for example: squats, bench presses and deadlifts)

Progressive Overload: The gradual increase of stress placed upon the body during exercise training. In training contexts, this generally involves progressively increasing some lifting parameter over time (usually weight or reps).

RPE: Rate of perceived exertion. A measure of how difficult a set was on a 1-10 scale, with 10 meaning muscular failure was achieved.

Secondary exercise: Compound exercises which involve less muscle mass (for example: cable rows, lunges, hip thrusts, military presses, pull-ups, etc.)

Tempo: The speed at which the lift occurs. Usually refers to concentric/eccentric speed.

Tertiary exercise: Isolation movements involving only one joint and primarily targeting a single muscle – these are usually used to isolate a specific, smaller muscle or to generate metabolic stress

Volume: Total amount of work performed. Usually approximated as sets x reps x load.



F.A.Qs

1: How do I know if I am progressing?

You want to think of this journey as a marathon, not a sprint. It can be difficult to accurately determine if you are making visual progress day-to-day or even week-to-week. Taking physique progress photos every 4-6 weeks and comparing them side-by-side is a good way to detect visual differences that you simply wouldn't notice in the mirror. But ultimately, because of the relationship between strength gain and muscle gain, the main metric you want to use for tracking your progress is strength. If you're getting stronger, while using good technique, you're progressing. It is strongly recommended to log every workout either in writing (print the program out or use a separate notebook) or in an app, so you don't have to rely on memory to keep track of personal strength records. Taking body measurements a few times a year can also be helpful but simply focusing

on steady strength progression will be your best proxy for determining muscular progress.

2. How do you use progressive overload?

See “Progression” on page [44](#)

3. Should I do cardio? When?

See Cardio Recommendations” page [53](#)

4. What does RPE mean?

See “RPE” page [46](#)

5. Should I eat in a caloric deficit, maintenance, or surplus while running this program?

(See Nutrition page [52](#)) Eating in a slight caloric surplus will yield the best results and best recovery, however, if your main goal is fat loss, eating in a caloric deficit will be necessary. As a beginner, you can continue to make strength and size progress while in a moderate caloric deficit and achieve body recomposition (lose fat and build muscle at the same time) if protein intake is sufficient (0.8-1g/lb bodyweight as a ballpark).

6. I am not getting sore from my workouts. Is the program not working?

Muscle soreness is largely attributed to eccentric contractions [\[1\]](#) and contractions at long muscle lengths [\[2\]](#). Delayed onset muscle soreness (DOMS) isn’t required for hypertrophy to occur, but the associated muscle damage might play a role in hypertrophy [\[3\]](#). With that said, the main goal of this program is to build muscle and

strength, not to get you feeling sore. In fact, reduced soreness over time indicates that your body is adapting and recovering, which is actually a good thing for continued progress.

7. I am getting very sore from my workouts. Should I still train if I'm sore?

You may experience increased soreness when you first begin the program because it is presenting a new stress to your body. Foam rolling can help reduce DOMS [4] and increase ROM [5], so if you are consistently getting sore week after week, consider adding a short 3-5 minute foam rolling routine at the end of the workouts. Otherwise, training while sore is not inherently problematic for muscle growth unless it puts you at an increased risk of injury. If you're having a difficult time getting into position for any of the planned exercises, or finding it difficult to complete a full ROM due to pain, do not train. Otherwise, in the case of mild soreness, perform a slightly longer warm up for each exercise and use your own discretion with avoiding injury being a top priority. One extra rest day will not set you back very far, but a serious injury will.

8. What if I don't have resistance bands?

They're important! I recommend using a high resistance hip circle for any "banded" exercise. I use the "GRIPPY HIP CIRCLE" which can be found here: <https://markbellslingshot.com/products/grippy-hip-circle>

8. What gym training gear should I use?

There is optional equipment that you can invest in that will make performing certain exercises much easier. I highly recommend these for not only this program, but for future programs in your lifting career.

Hip Thrust

Barbell Pad: <http://bit.ly/BarbellPadRed>

Banded Hip Thrust

Grippy Hip Circle (Resistance Band): <https://markbellslingshot.com/products/grippy-hip-circle>

Glute Cable Kickback

Ankle Attachment: <https://amzn.to/31xmgp0>

9. I have a belt. When should I wear it?

Optionally use a lifting belt for working sets on exercises like squats, deadlifts and overhead (military) presses. Strength is a specific skill, so practice every rep in exactly the same way (meaning, if you're going to use a belt at all, use it consistently and for the same movements). I wouldn't recommend wearing a belt on light warm-up sets.

10. Why isn't there much exercise variation from week to week?

Changing exercises from week to week is more likely to flatten out the strength progression curve. This is to ensure both progression by adding volume incrementally to these specific movements and mastery of these movements in terms of form and technique. There is large variation in exercise selection between Blocks 1 and 2 to avoid monotony and create a novel training stimulus to finish the program strong.

11. What do I do after I finish the program?

You have the option of running back through the same program again, after

determining your new 1 rep maxes on the main lifts. If your schedule allows, you may want to try the other split variations included in this program and starting those programs with increased strength. You may optionally run through each split variation multiple times. After running through all the variations this program offers, you may want to graduate to my Intermediate to Advanced Women's Specialization Program.

(<https://www.stephaniebuttermore.com/womens-specialization-program>)

12. What are the blank boxes in the middle of each program for?

They are for you to track your weights each week, so you can focus on strength progression from week 1 to week 4 of each block. Of course, this will only work if you print the program out. The other option would be to keep a notebook and simply pencil in your lifts each week. Keeping up with this habit of tracking is going to be an extremely important part of your success on this program.

13. I find hip thrusts awkward. Is there any alternative exercise?

Yes, but give it your best effort first. The barbell hip thrust has been shown again and again to be highly effective as a glute builder for a reason. I highly recommend getting your own barbell pad because they are often missing from gyms. This is the one I have and I keep it in my gym bag. (<http://bit.ly/BarbellPadRed>). Alternatively, you can try using the leg extension machine which I've shown on my channel before but here is a good tutorial on how to do it (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m81wYloZJvM>).

14. I recently had a breast augmentation surgery. Can I still do this program?

If you had a breast augmentation surgery within the past 4 weeks, it is wise to ask your surgeon if you are able to exercise. Typically, you will need to ease back into upper

body training, and stick to the more stable lower body exercises. Tucking your elbows while pressing can alleviate discomfort caused from surgery.

Please direct all other questions to stephaniebuttermore@gmail.com. Please avoid directing questions about this program to social media as it is not a reliable means of making contact with me or getting the correct information. Please allow 3-5 business days for a reply.



PROGRAM STRUCTURE

Each program split (3-day, 4-day, 5-day) included in this training manual is designed to promote muscular/strength symmetry, along with highlighting the importance of form. Each program is broken up into two different 4-week “blocks,” which you can see as a mini-program.

BLOCK ONE:

Block One will introduce the basic movements you will focus on for the vast majority of your lifting career. If you have little-to-zero training experience, you might feel very sore at first. For this reason, the exertion and progression is kept much more moderate, which will allow you to really hone in on your lifting technique. You will work on some isolation movements with a bit higher exertion, as they are less technical movements (require less coordination). If you’ve been

doing circuit training before this program, it's very to normal to feel like you aren't doing much in the gym. Volume is one of the most important factors for hypertrophy, but there must be necessary proximity to failure for volume to amount to hypertrophy.

BLOCK TWO:

It's normal to have more motor control (more coordination) in your dominant side than your non-dominant side. This can raise issues down the line if it's not addressed. If you're new to lifting, you're almost in a better position because everything is so new, you don't have to undo bad form habits. Block two will focus on unilateral (single limb exercises) and isolateral (both limbs are moving independent of each other) movements for this very reason. If you have some lifting experience, the sooner you address potential imbalances, the quicker you will be able to gain strength and have a balanced physique.

Since you are learning a new set of exercises (while still including the basics) Block Two will start off with a lower exertion to allow for an emphasis on mastering form. With that being said, now that you have a bit more experience with basic compound movements, the exertion will stay higher for this block. This isn't a time to let your form slip, so make sure you are mindful of your technique and always keep trying to improve it.



WHY WOMEN SHOULD LIFT WEIGHTS

Lifting weights is quite literally more than meets the eye. When we think about health and fitness, we often think of bland kale salads and endless amounts of cardio. While cardio certainly has its place (which we discuss shortly), there will be a lot of carry-over between lifting weights and cardio, as well as benefits mutually exclusive to lifting. To state the obvious, a muscular physique will be far more determined by lifting weights than it will from doing cardio. In order to transform your body, focusing on lifting weights is a must. Getting stronger and improving your physique can massively impact how you see yourself not only in the mirror but also who you are as a person. Gaining strength can help with simple tasks

like carrying groceries, moving boxes or furniture into a new home, picking up kids etc. Body composition is inarguably a good marker of your health/life expectancy. In a review from 2004, body fat was found to have a “J” shaped correlation with all-cause mortality (which means extremely low body fat is somewhat linked to all-cause mortality, then there’s a happy-medium where all-cause mortality is at it’s lowest, then beyond that, it increases), whereas fat-free mass (quite literally anything that isn’t fat: bone, muscle, water, etc.) has a reversed “J” shape association (meaning very little fat-free mass has a very high association with death, then as you gain muscle, the association becomes lower and lower until a certain point)[6].

Looks aside, lifting will improve things we generally associate with “health” including; bone mineral density (BMD) [7], decreased cardiovascular disease (CVD) risk [8], decreased pain [9], issues related to fibromyalgia [10], improved sleep quality [11], and much more. Some of these benefits are exclusively important to women, so lifting should never be thought of as a men’s-only activity.

From a psychological perspective, lifting weights can play a tremendous role in improving confidence, self-esteem and reducing anxiety. If you’re lifting for the first time, it’s perfectly normal to feel a bit lost and overwhelmed by the idea of going into the gym. Overcoming this fear is actually the first step in overcoming the doubt you have in your mind. After you start going to the gym more and more, you will start to realize that everyone started off exactly where you are and nobody is in there to belittle you, but encourage you to improve.



FUNCTIONAL ANATOMY

Understanding how the body functions to contract muscles, move joints, and where a muscle “starts” (origin) and “ends” (insertion) can help give you a better idea of why you will be doing certain exercises.

MUSCLE CONTRACTION (ECCENTRIC, CONCENTRIC)

The origin is the fixed attachment which does not move and the insertion is the attachment which moves closer to the origin when a muscle contracts, giving it its shape. If you look at an easy example, your biceps attach right beneath your elbow and they originate underneath your shoulder. When you flex your biceps, you will notice you always pull your forearm towards your shoulder, not your

shoulder towards your forearm. This contracting phase, referred to as the concentric phase (positive phase) often lifting the weight, is followed by the eccentric phase (negative phase) often lowering the weight.

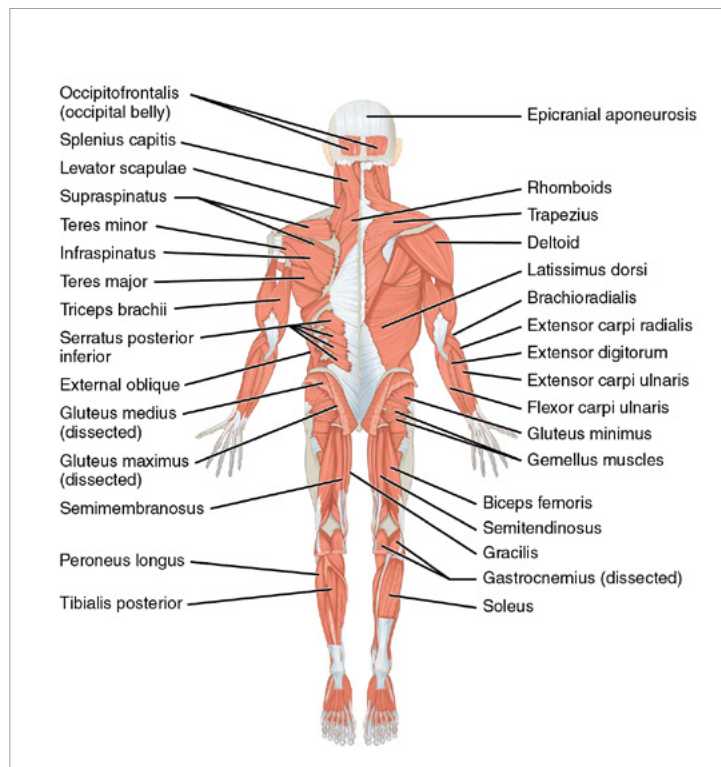


Figure 1A: The Main Posterior Muscles

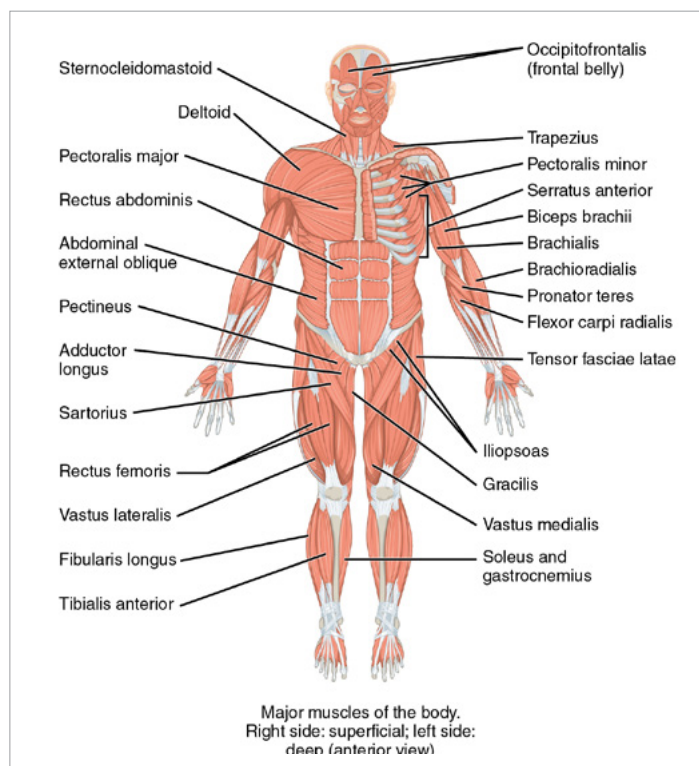


Figure 1B: The Main Anterior Muscles

QUADRICEPS:

The quadriceps (“quads” for short) are comprised of four muscles, often referred to as “heads”: the vastus lateralis (“quad sweep”), vastus medialis (“tear drop”), rectus femoris (the middle portion of your upper thigh), and vastus intermedius (which runs underneath rectus femoris). The quads act to extend the knee, taking the leg from a bent position to a straight position. Each muscle of the quad has its own unique insertion which we won’t worry about too much here. Just remember that the main action of the quads is to extend (straighten) the knee.

ORIGIN:

The vasti muscles originate on the body of femur ("thigh bone"). The rectus femoris originates on the ilium of the "hip bone"

INSERTION:

Tibial tuberosity

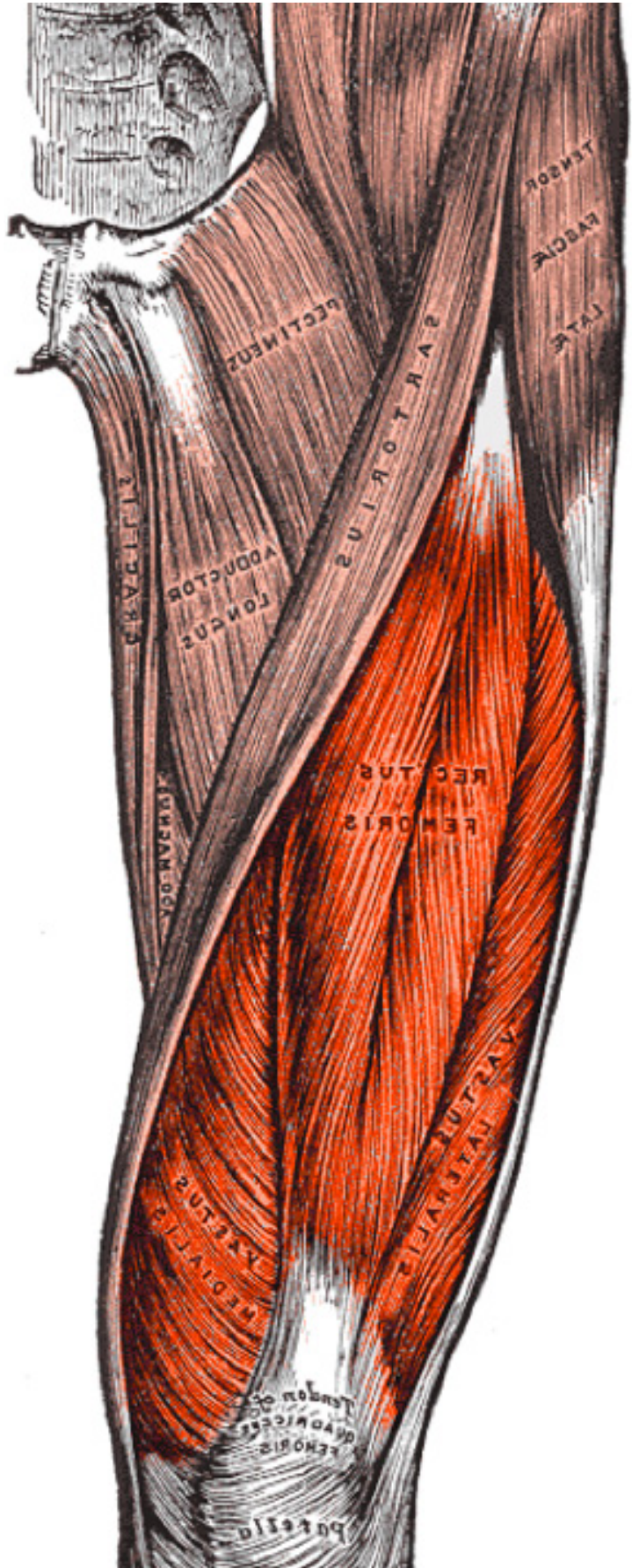


Figure 2: Quadriceps Anatomy

HAMSTRINGS

The hamstrings are actually a complex of four muscles: semimembranosus, semitendinosus, and biceps femoris (which consists of a long head and a short head). The hamstrings collectively act to both flex the knee (take the leg from a straightened position to a bent position, as in a leg curl) and extend the hip (pushing your hips forward, as in a deadlift).

ORIGIN:

The semitendinosus, semimembranosus, and long head of the biceps femoris originate on the ischial tuberosity. The short head of the biceps femoris originates on the linea aspera.

INSERTION:

The semitendinosus and semimembranosus both insert on the tibia, while both the long and short heads of the biceps femoris insert at the fibula.

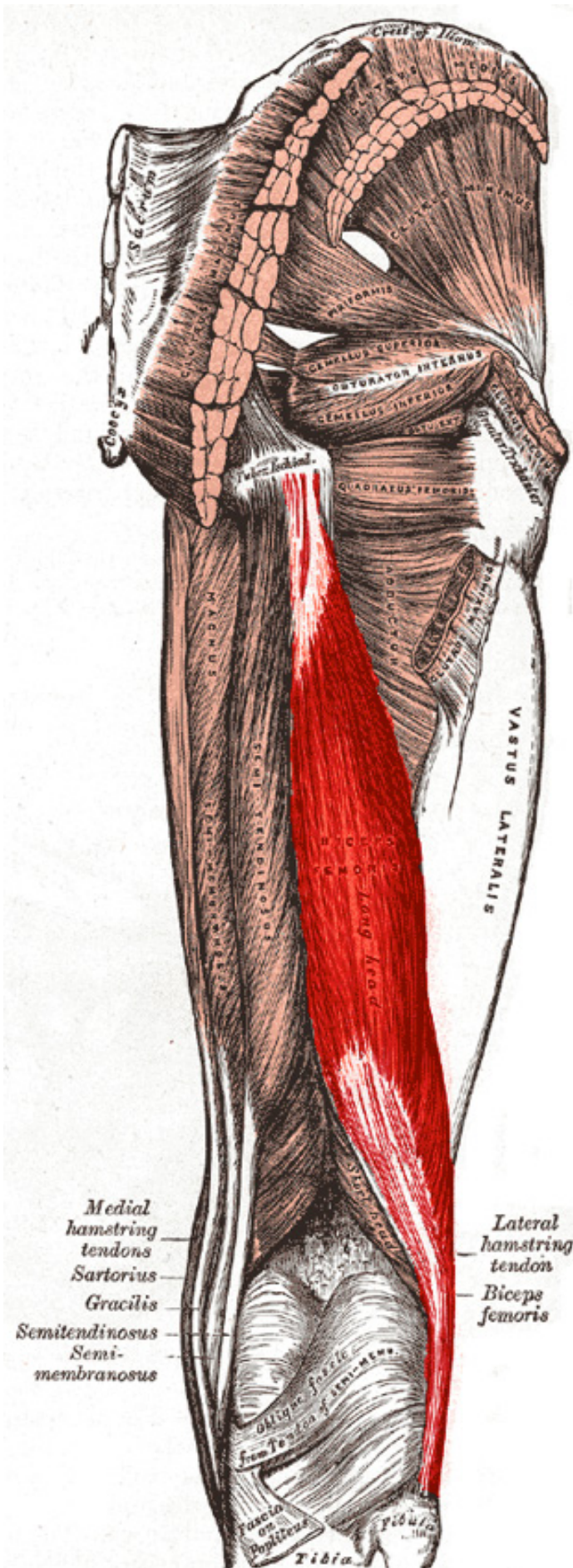


Figure 3: Hamstrings Anatomy

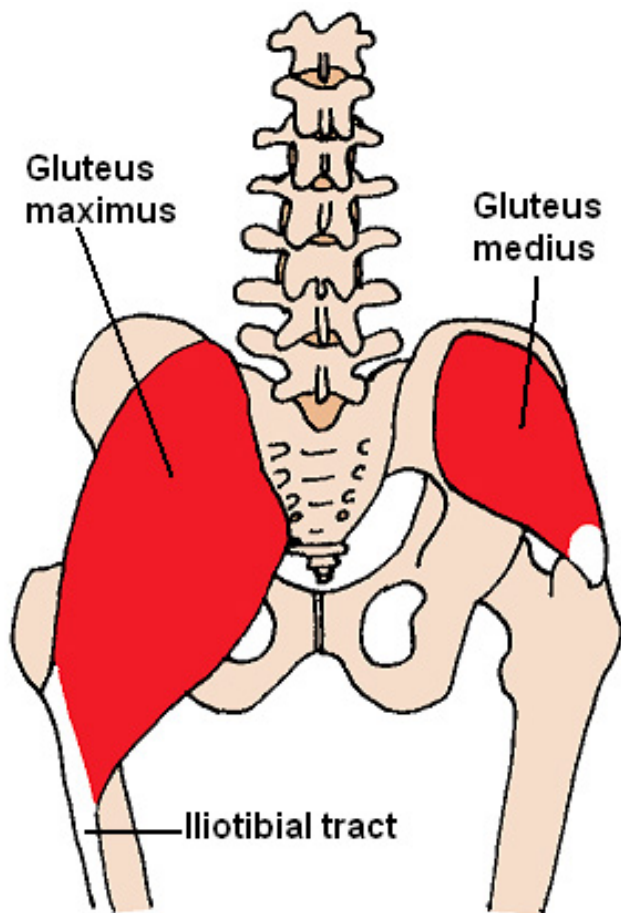


Figure 4: Gluteals Anatomy

GLUTEALS:

The gluteals (or “glutes”) are also a complex of muscles consisting of the gluteus maximus, gluteus medius, and gluteus minimus. As the name suggests, the gluteus maximus is the largest of the three, followed by the gluteus medius, and the smallest gluteus minimus. The gluteus maximus has multiple origins including the pelvis, sacrum, coccyx, and thoracolumbar fascia and multiple insertions including the upper femur and IT band. Because of this, it is able to perform a wide variety of functions, but primarily:

- Hip extension (push your hips forward)
- Hip abduction (move your thigh away from the midline)
- Hip external rotation (rotating your thigh bone outwards)
- Posterior pelvic tilt (tucking your butt “in”)

The smaller glute medius still occupies a hefty portion of the rear hip musculature and functions primarily as a stabilizer during dynamic movement and as a hip abductor. It originates on the pelvis and inserts on the femur. It is most effectively trained with exercises that require a high degree of stability, especially unilateral movements such as walking lunges, and exercises that train hip abduction, such as machine hip abductions.

ORIGIN:

The gluteus maximus, medius, and minimus originate on the ilium.

INSERTION:

The gluteus maximus and gluteus minimus insert to the iliotibial tract (IT band) and the gluteal tuberosity on the femur. The gluteus medius inserts to the greater trochanter on the femur.



Figure 5: Pectoral Anatomy

PECTORALIS:

There are two pectoralis muscles (pecs for short) located on your chest: the pectoralis major and the pectoralis minor. The pectoralis major can be divided into two heads: the clavicular head or “upper chest” (which originates at the clavicle) and the sternal head or “lower chest” (which

originates at the sternum). The pecs act to adduct the upper arm (bring the upper arm across the body), and to internally rotate the shoulder joint. The clavicular fibers also aid in shoulder flexion (raising your upper arm up), but the sternal fibers do not.

ORIGIN:

The pectoralis major originates on the sternum and clavicle. The pectoralis minor originates on the 3rd-5th ribs.

INSERTION:

The pectoralis major inserts on the humerus. The pectoralis minor inserts to the coracoid process (front of your shoulder).

BACK:

The back is comprised of a massive web of muscles, so for the sake of simplicity we will only look at the largest back muscles. The latissimus dorsi (lats for short) is a big muscle which runs from just underneath your arm pit all the way down to the bottom of your back. The lats primarily act to extend the shoulder (bring your upper arm downward) and adduct the shoulder (moving your elbows towards your mid back).

The trapezius (traps for short), is another large muscle running from the base of the skull down to the middle of your inner back. When people think about the traps, they tend to only think of the upper fibers, but the middle and lower fibers take up a very large surface area as well. The traps act to elevate the

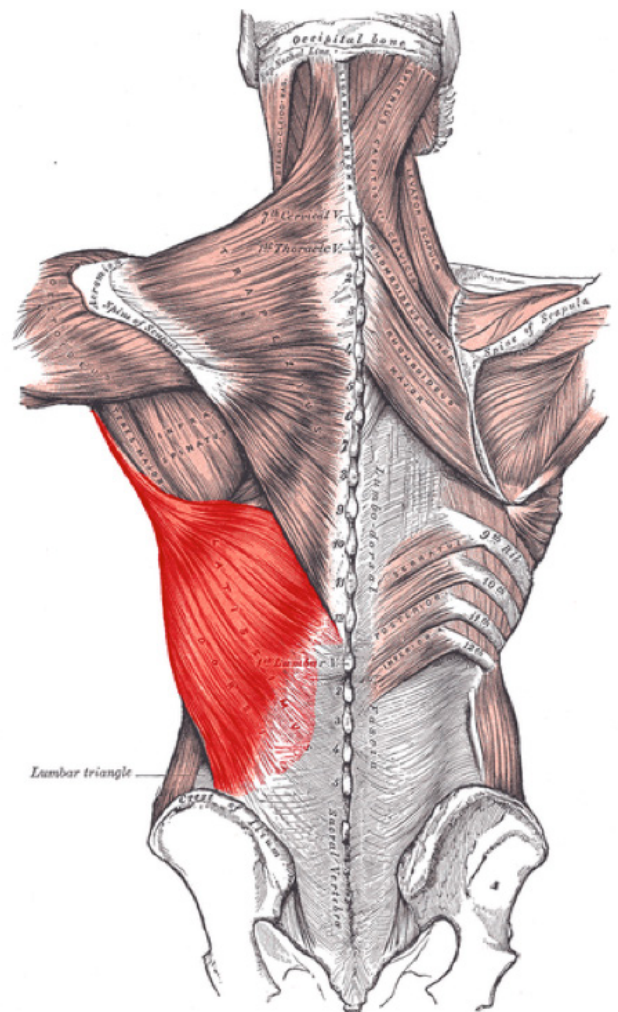


Figure 6: Latissimus Dorsi Anatomy

scapulae (shrugging your shoulders), retract the scapulae (pull the shoulder blades back), and extend the shoulder (pull your arms backward when your elbows are raised).

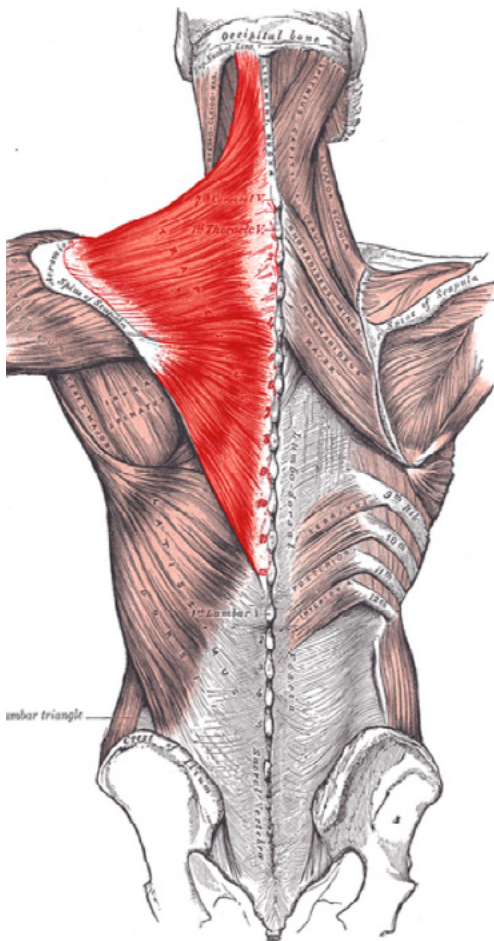


Figure 7: Trapezius Anatomy

LATS:

ORIGIN:

Iliac crest and thoracolumbar fascia

INSERTION:

Humerus

TRAPS:

ORIGIN:

Occipital bone (upper traps), corresponding supraspinous ligaments for the mid and lower traps

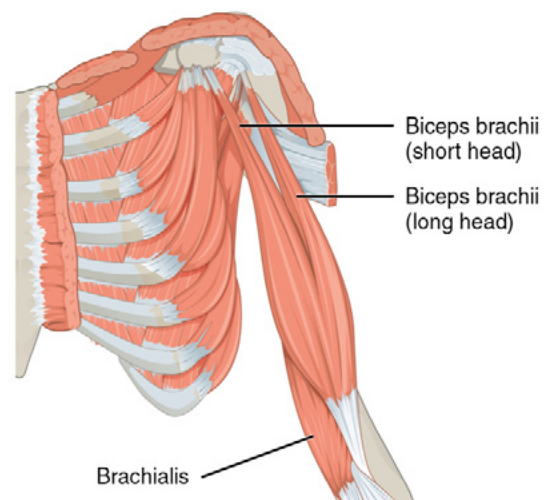
INSERTION:

Nuchal ligament

BICEPS:

The biceps brachii are a two-headed muscle containing a long head and a short head. They collectively act to flex the elbows (bring the elbow from a straightened position to a bent position), and supinate the wrist (twist the pinky upwards). The

Figure 8: Biceps Anatomy



brachialis, which runs underneath the biceps brachii, is also a strong elbow flexor.

ORIGIN:

Coracoid process, supraglenoid tubercle

INSERTION:

Radial tuberosity

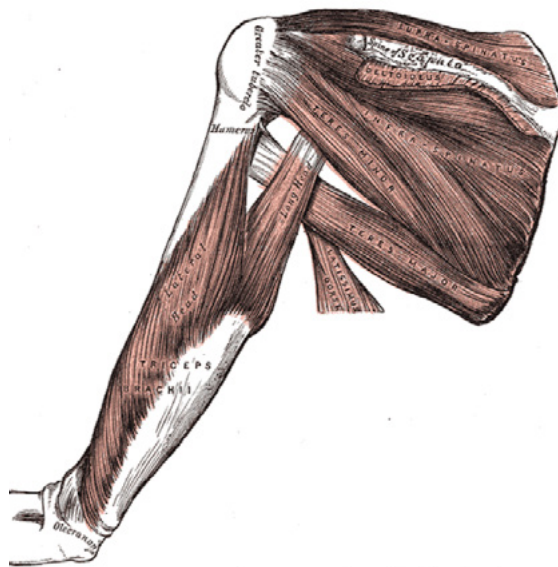


Figure 9: Triceps Anatomy

TRICEPS:

The triceps lie on the back of your upper arm and are made up of three heads: a long head, a medial head, and a lateral head. The triceps collectively act to extend the elbow (bring the elbows from a bent position to a straightened position).

ORIGIN:

Infraglenoid tubercle, radial groove

INSERTION:

Olecranon process on ulna

DELTOIDS:

The deltoids (or delts for short) are comprised of 3 different heads, the anterior deltoid (the “front” delt), the lateral deltoid (also known as the “middle” delt, and often mistakenly called the “medial delt”), and the posterior delt (also known as the “rear” delt). The anterior delt acts to flex the shoulder (raise the arm up), the lateral delt acts

to abduct the upper arm (raise your upper arm out directly to your sides), and the posterior delt acts to abduct the shoulder (pull the shoulder back when the elbows are raised).

ORIGIN:

Clavicle, acromion process, spine of scapula

INSERTION:

Deltoid tuberosity of humerus

ABS:

The abs are a huge web containing many muscles which all have a similar function. When talking about the abs, we are typically referring to the rectus abdominis – the “6-pack.” The rectus abdominis acts to flex the spine, rotate the torso, and resist spinal

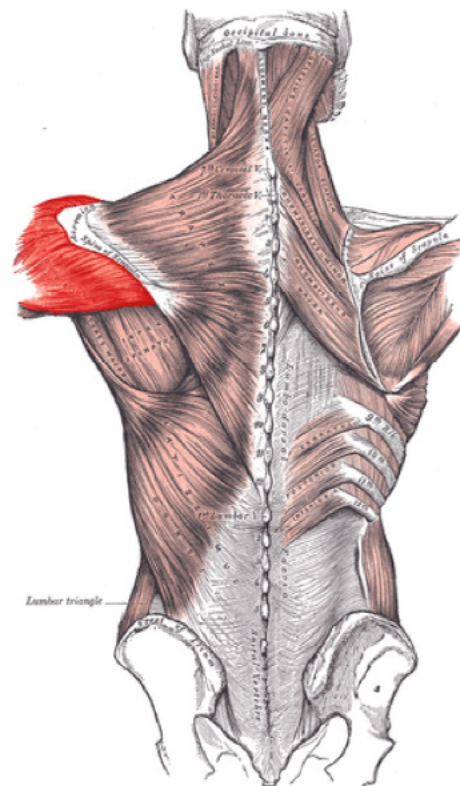


Figure 10: Deltoid Anatomy

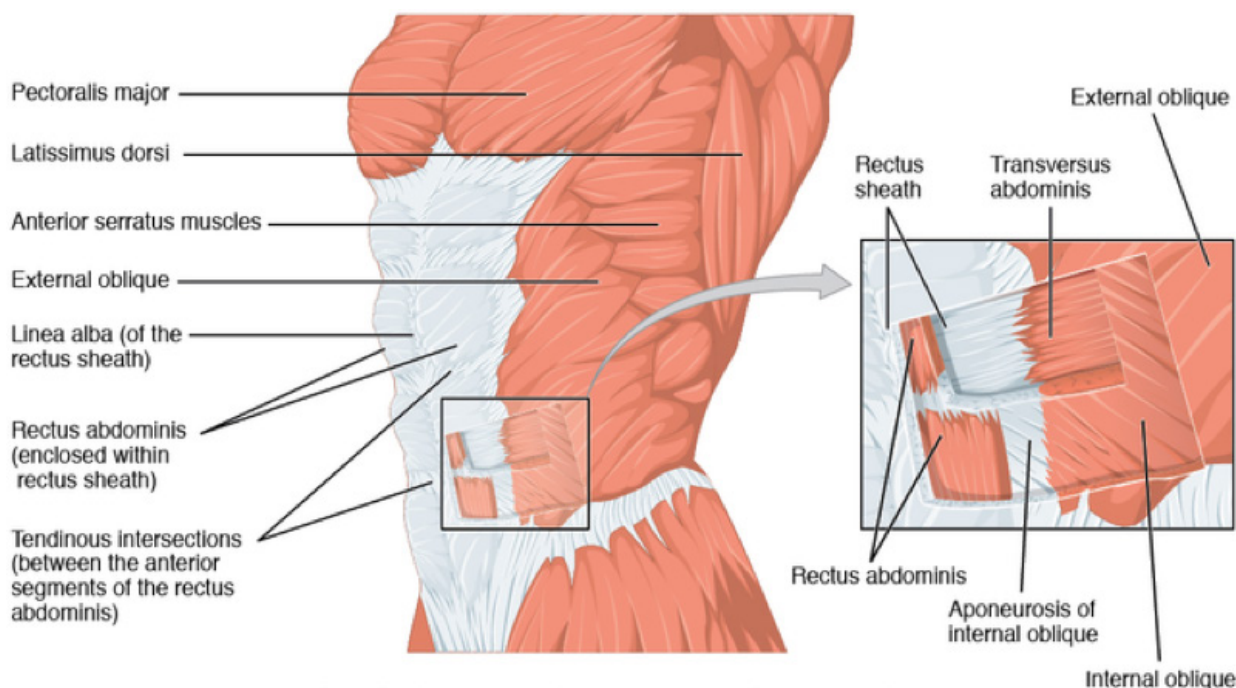


Figure 11: Abdominal Anatomy

extension (prevent your lower back from arching inwards).

ORIGIN:

Crest of pubis

INSERTION:

Xiphoid process



CALVES:

The calves are a complex consisting of two muscles – the gastrocnemius (or gastroc for short) and the soleus. The gastrocnemius is the big muscle underneath the back of your knee and the soleus is a smaller, flatter muscle which runs underneath the gastroc down to your ankle. Both the gastroc and soleus act to plantarflex the ankle (point your toes down).

ORIGIN:

Lateral and medial condyle of femur

INSERTION:

Tendo calcaneus

Figure 12: Anatomy of the Calf Muscles



JOINT ACTIONS

LOWER BODY:

Hip extension: Bringing your hips inline with your body.

Hip flexion: Pushing your hips “back” away from your body’s midline.

Knee extension: Straightening your lower leg inline with your upper leg.

Knee flexion: Pulling your lower leg “behind” your upper leg.

Hip abduction: Pushing your knees “out” away from your body’s center line.

Hip adduction: Pulling your knees “in” towards your body’s center line.

Hip external rotation: Pushing your knees “out” without moving your upper leg.

Hip internal rotation: Pulling your knees “in” without moving your upper leg.

Posterior pelvic tilt: Pulling your hips “in” underneath you.

Anterior pelvic tilt: Popping your hips “out” and “back” behind you.

Plantar flexion: Pointing your toes down.

Dorsiflexion: Point your toes up.

UPPER BODY:

GLENOHUMERAL JOINT

Shoulder flexion: Raising your upper arms straight up in front of you.

Shoulder extension: Pulling your upper arm behind your torso (from the front).

Shoulder adduction: Pulling your upper arm “down and in” from an overhead position.

Shoulder abduction: Raising your upper arm “up and out”.

Shoulder transverse adduction: Pushing your upper arm “in” across your chest.

Shoulder transverse extension: Pulling your upper arm “up and back”.

Shoulder internal rotation: Rotating your upper arm inward.

Shoulder external rotation: Rotating your upper arm outward.

ELBOW JOINT

Elbow Flexion: Bending your forearm upward.

Elbow Extension: Straightening your forearm inline with your upper arm.

WRIST

Wrist Supination: Rotating your forearm such that your palms are facing “up”.

Wrist Pronation: Rotating your forearm such that your palms are facing “down”.

SCAPULA

Scapular Protraction: Rolling your upper back “forward”.

Scapular Retraction: Pulling your upper back “backward”.

Scapular Depression: Pushing your upper back “downward”.

Scapular Elevation: Shrugging your shoulders “upward”.

SPINE

Lumbar flexion: Bending your spine “forward”.

Lumbar extension: Bending your spine “backward”.

Thoracic flexion: Hunching your upper back forward.

Thoracic extension: Pulling your upper back backward.

Rotation: Twisting your spine across your body.



TRAINING PRINCIPLES THAT ARE IMPORTANT

Now that we've establish just some of the reasons why lifting is so important, let's look at what exactly makes a good workout and what doesn't, because not all workouts are created equal.

TECHNIQUE (ALSO SEE VIDEO DEMONSTRATIONS):

There is a common cliché in the lifting community “don't sacrifice form for weight.” This is something that most people actually get very right, but it still deserves to be talked about. You can think of lifting weights as contracting your muscles against gravity in a particular way. With increasing load, your body will

want to move into certain positions to make the exercise easier, but this will put your body in a vulnerable position (for example: your lower back will tend to “round”) but in doing so you will be at a higher risk for a lower back injury. The proper technique on certain lifts will feel awkward and even incorrect at first, but developing your technique early in your lifting career will save yourself from injury, make exercises more efficient, and will keep your body pain free.

PROGRESSIVE OVERLOAD

Progressive overload is one of the most important components of your workout plan. To put it simply, progressive overload will manifest itself as adding more weight to an exercise, increasing the amount of reps you do in one set, or increasing the amount of sets you perform in a workout, all while keeping your technique the same. We will discuss this further in the “Progression” portion of the program, but at first simply focusing on getting your form as good as possible will improve your motor control, allowing you to lift heavier weights. Progressive overload will be a primary focus as the research is very clear on its influence on muscle growth [12].

MIND-MUSCLE CONNECTION

The mind-muscle connection (MMC) is a bit of an advanced technique that takes time to develop, but it’s something to be aware of. Even when technique and load is equated for, simply focusing on squeezing a particular muscle group can make it grow faster than thinking about just going through the range of motion [13]



TRAINING PRINCIPLES THAT ARE NOT IMPORTANT

SORENESS

Soreness is largely caused from muscle damage (actual micro-tearing on your muscle fibers), which is a byproduct of your muscle being stretched with load [14]. Muscle damage might be a factor of hypertrophy, so it is certainly not a bad thing to get sore, but it shouldn't be the goal of your workout. If you aren't getting sore, that doesn't mean you aren't pushing yourself hard enough – the more you lift, the less sore you will actually get which is called the “repeated bout effect”. I have an entire video on soreness and whether or not you should train sore so check it out if you are interested in learning more. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ut_4C_5CNbg)

KEEPING YOUR HEART RATE HIGH/SWEATING/HEAVY BREATHING

Lifting weights requires a high output of energy for a relatively short period of time (typically between 10-45 seconds in a set). Your heart rate likely won't be elevated very much at all, but this doesn't mean that your muscles aren't working. In order for a muscle to grow, it needs to be pushed to a close degree of failure [15]. This will require you to take longer rest periods between each set. Doing things like jumping squats, kickbacks, push-ups, etc. will decrease your energy, thus not allowing you to focus on performing the most amount of reps possible on your actual sets. For this reason, I strongly advise against circuit training if improving your physique is your primary goal. Similarly, a good workout generally consists mostly of lifting weights. If you want to do cardio, do it after your workout after you hit the weights or on a rest day.

SWITCHING THINGS UP

Exercise variety makes lifting fun, interesting, and can break the monotony up but with that being said, it's important to master the skill component of lifting before consistently switching your program around or you won't allow your body enough time to actually get comfortable with your current program. For more long-term lifting, there will be certain exercises that will be staples in your program, and others that you rotate in and out. From a physiological perspective, your muscles don't know what exercise you are doing, they are either being loaded or not, so "muscle confusion" isn't a real thing.



PROGRAMMING PRINCIPLES

FREQUENCY

Simply put, frequency refers to how often you are hitting the same muscle group each week. There's a lot of myth surrounding how often you are able to hit a muscle group within a week. The research has very definitively shown that hitting a muscle group at least 2 times per week is ideal for muscle growth [16]. Higher frequency might be better for hypertrophy, but since all research must equate for volume, it is hard to say whether or not this is the case. With this in mind, each program will target your lower body a minimum of 2 times a week.

VOLUME

Volume is likely the second most important determinant of hypertrophy [17].

Volume can be seen as sets x reps x weight, although it is not needed to calculate

this out for your workouts. I think it's important to note that there might be a threshold beyond which more volume is actually counterproductive [18], so sticking with a bit more of a moderate approach is best for now. As you gain strength, your volume will be increasing by default, so there's no need to tack on more sets or more reps. Strength gains come very rapidly in your first few years (especially after you have form locked in), so simply focusing on that will guarantee results.

EFFORT

Rate of Perceived Exertion (RPE) See page 46 will be the scale at which we use to roughly calculate effort. A sufficient amount of fatigue in each muscle group is required to optimize hypertrophy, which is why the effort will always be above 50% of as much as you can do. As you will notice, each block starts with slightly lower effort, then it gradually increases throughout the block. This will ensure you are giving your body time to adapt to heavier weights without running yourself into the ground.

REST PERIODS

Taking longer rest periods will allow you to use more weight and overload movements at a quicker rate compared to short rest periods [19]. With that being said, rest periods should correlate with how difficult an exercise is. Using deadlifts as an example – you should feel like you need to take ~3-5 minutes of rest between sets in order to match your strength on the previous set. If you can replicate your strength with just 45 seconds rest between sets, you likely aren't pushing yourself hard enough on each set. This can actually be another great factor towards calculating your RPE (the more rest time you require after a set, the higher the RPE). However, for smaller isolation movements, you can work quite quickly, as they won't be as systemically fatiguing

due to less overall muscle groups being used.

RECOVERY

Recovery is often the factor which gets left out. While it is not technically an aspect of your program, it will serve as a general checklist to ensure you aren't doing too much in the gym. While you can still workout when you're sore, your workouts won't be very effective if you are so roasted that you are barely able to walk. If this is the case, you might need to reconsider RPE, training frequency, etc.

Recovery not only looks at what you are doing inside the gym, but also outside the gym. Things like sleep, nutrition, supplementation, other physical activity, etc. will play a massive role in your body's ability to bounce back for your next training session. If you are untrained (under 3 months of consistent training), you will likely feel extremely exhausted as your body adjusts to the level of stress you are putting on it.



PROGRESSION

From week to week the primary goal is progressive overload, which is widely considered to be the single most important factor for building muscle and gaining strength. Progressive overload can be achieved through three main avenues:

1. INCREASING ABSOLUTE LOAD

Increasing absolute load can be seen simply as adding more weight to the bar, dumbbells or machine. This will be the “bread and butter” of your progression from week to week. Increasing load will increase volume, as long as sets and reps are kept constant. Since the primary compound movements have the greatest loading potential (due to utilizing more muscle groups), it’s particularly important to gain strength over time on these exercises.

2. INCREASING REPS WITH THE SAME LOAD

Certain exercises ultimately lead to form breakdown if you focus too much on increasing weight. For these movements, progressing by adding reps will yield more total volume more effectively. “Secondary” exercises have less overloading capacity due to a few factors (balance, range of motion, muscle groups utilized, etc.), so it is best to work in a rep range prior to adding weight (which we will discuss shortly).

3. IMPROVING THE MIND-MUSCLE CONNECTION AND FORM

Although the mind-muscle connection doesn't directly impact any variable in the volume equation, it can still yield greater hypertrophy indirectly. As I mentioned in the mind-muscle connection segment, it may not be a very familiar concept at the beginning, however as you progress, it will start to come more natural to you and improving it over time can be very beneficial for your training. Improving the mind-muscle connection and/or technique can apply more tension onto the desired muscle, meaning that if it is improving, it should count as a form of progressive overload.

REP RANGES

When a rep range is given, the goal is to add reps while keeping the weight the same until the top end of the range is reached for all sets. From there, you will add weight and go back to the low end of the rep range. In the real world, it might not work out that neatly. As long as you're adding some weight or some reps over time on average (meaning it doesn't have to increase EVERY week) you're doing it right.



RATE OF PERCEIVED EXERTION

Rate of perceived exertion (RPE) is how you will be determining what weight to use with each exercise. It is a very important tool which will set you up for long term success in the gym. It will not only be used to ensure you are fully recovering from each session (which we will talk about shortly), it will actually be used to determine how much weight you use. The scale of RPE goes from 1-10, but for this program, we really only have to worry about 6-10 (as anything below RPE6 is incredibly difficult to detect. From a simple perspective, you can see RPE as a percentage of your maximal exertion (RPE6 = 60% of failure, RPE7 = 70% of failure, RPE8=80% of failure, RPE9= 90% of failure, RPE10= 100% of failure, RPE10 is actually training until you can't complete another rep or your form breaks down significantly). You can also see this as the inverse of reps in reserve, or RIR. This means that an RPE9 is saving 1 rep in the tank, an RPE8 is saving 2 reps in the tank, etc.

If you're VERY new to the gym, you will have a difficult time discerning RPE and RIR as you learn the form of everything. Err on the side of caution when you're figuring out how much weight you should be using, as form will inevitably change the heavier you go. After your set, ask yourself how many reps you think you could've gotten before you ended the set. This will seem very arbitrary and vague at first, but after doing it for several months, you'll start to get a very good sense of what it means.

RPE/RIR will give you guidance for load selection, as it will guide you to the "sweet-spot" between not pushing yourself hard enough and exhausting yourself too much (which isn't a good thing). The best way to illustrate this is to use an example. Let's say you're able to squat 100lbs for 5 reps, and you feel like you can only get 1 more rep with good form; this would be an RPE9. After a few weeks of doing this, you might feel like you're able to get another rep or two with the same exact weight. This program will gradually increase the RPE each week for most exercises, so instead of doing more reps to maintain the RPE, you will actually add weight to the exercise to make it sufficiently challenging.

It's important to note that the same RPE will feel different depending on the exercise, rep range, etc., but the same principles apply.

Since we're talking about exertion, it brings up the question of why does it actually matter? Well, really digging into the science of how a muscle grows, your nervous system sends a signal to your muscle telling it to contract. Your body wants to be energy efficient and use the appropriate amount of force to perform a certain task (imagine using all of your strength to lift a purse off the ground). When you're lifting

weights, you will start off recruiting smaller muscle fibers (slow twitch muscle fibers), then gradually call upon larger muscle fibers (fast twitch) as the task becomes increasingly strenuous. The larger muscle fibers have more potential to grow than the smaller muscle fibers, so it's important to train close to muscular failure for hypertrophy, which is precisely why we won't do anything below an RPE6. This is also why actually lifting heavy is better for hypertrophy and circuit training won't reliably elicit physique changes long term.



OPTIMIZING SUCCESS: GET THE MOST BANG FOR YOUR BUCK

HOW TO TRACK PROGRESS

Tracking progress, self-reflection, self-monitoring, etc. are all critical for ensuring you aren't spinning your wheels. Since building muscle is a very slow process, it's important to use a few tools to ensure you are making the most out of the program.

One of the most basic ways to track your progress is very simply to keep a log of some body metrics in a list. If you've seen any of my YouTube videos,

you'll see that I keep loose tabs on my bodyweight, body fat % according to BIA, and circumference of a few parts of my body (waist, hips, thigh, arms, etc.). As I mentioned, progress does take time, so you don't want to drive yourself mad taking multiple measurements too often. If you don't feel comfortable taking measurements too frequently, I would gauge progress by taking occasional progress photos and keeping tabs on your strength progression. If you are comfortable taking measurements or using a scale that measures your body composition (like a body analyzer: <http://vpwow.com/sbuttermore> you can use code:sbuttermore to get a discount) I recommend taking measurements a few days a week and get a weekly average. It's very normal for these measurements to fluctuate (depending on your cycle, food volume, hydration levels, edema, etc.).

As I've touched upon several times, pushing close to failure is very important for hypertrophy to occur. You want to strike a balance between not lifting hard enough and pushing every set to failure, there is a goldilocks zone. There are a few good general recommendations, which you can use as a mental checklist at the end of your workout/set.

To start, you should be feeling muscular pain while lifting. The pain shouldn't be sudden and sharp, but rather a dull pain that gradually increases in severity as you approach failure. If you aren't feeling any pain on your muscle, you might not be training with adequately heavy weights. On the other hand, if you're feeling a sudden sharp pain that isn't fairly consistent throughout the range of motion, your form might need to improve. In this case, decrease the load by ~10-20% and focus on form. Another tool

which you can use to see if you're pushing yourself hard enough is your energy levels after each set. While I prescribed rest period intervals between each set, you should feel as if you need that rest period. If you feel like you can replicate your strength from your previous set after 30 seconds, you likely aren't training with heavy enough weight, or you might need to scale your RPE higher.

WHEN TO INCREASE LOAD

Progressive overload is an essential component to gaining muscle. Using RPE to manage effort and following a periodized program will set you up in a great position to achieve progressive overload, but this still begs the question: when exactly do I add weight to the bar?

This program is designed as a sort of "wave" loading with 4-week blocks. For compound movements, you should be able to add weight every 4 weeks. The first week is intentionally designed to be the easiest of the 4 weeks. Use this time to get comfortable using heavier weights while maintaining good form. The effort will slowly pick up throughout the 4 weeks, and you should finish it with a PR.

Isolation movements are a bit more complicated, as they have much more of a limit for how strong you can get on them. This is where RPE is uniquely beneficial, as it allows you to choose how much weight you need to use based on how difficult the exercise is intended to be. Since RPE is related to a max effort set (taken to failure), it's important to actually train to failure occasionally during each block. The best way to

explain how to use RPE is to use an example. If you've been doing sets of 10 on a particular exercise with 20lbs, then you do a max effort set and get 18 reps, it's fair to say that you can increase weight by the next smallest increment (22.5lbs if it's a dumbbell). If you're only able to get 12 reps with the all-out set, you've been working at a true RPE8 and likely don't need to increase weight. Over time, the weights you use will slowly start to decrease in RPE. You want to load the exercise to match the RPE.

NUTRITION

Nutrition is obviously a massive component to your physique and health. Now I am not an RD, so I highly recommend talking to your doctor about making significant dietary changes. However I do feel comfortable making some general dietary recommendations. I generally recommend a moderate protein diet (around .8g-1.0g/lb of bodyweight per day) [20]. For example, if you weigh 120 lbs, aim to eat 96g to 120g of protein per day. Beyond that, you will gain more muscle eating in a slight caloric surplus, but it's by no means necessary for muscle growth at this stage in your lifting career. There are numerous calculators out there, but I think it's important to note that is no magical macronutrient ratios for you. There is, however, macronutrient ratios which will allow you to make progress while being able to enjoy food. If your goal is to build muscle and lose fat, you can do this without cutting out whole macronutrients, so NEVER eliminate carbohydrates or fats entirely as this will hurt your performance in the gym.

Ultimately, building muscle will improve global body composition; so keep muscular gains at the forefront. Carbohydrates are good for you from a body composition perspective and a health perspective. Carbohydrates can also give you energy, so I recommend eating carbs before and after you train. If you're eating a very low carbohydrate diet to begin with, introducing carbs back into your diet will likely make you gain water weight and glycogen weight. Don't panic, glycogen (the stored form of carbohydrates found in your muscle and liver) will actually make you appear more muscular – it's common for bodybuilding and bikini competitors to intentionally eat a lot of carbohydrates to "inflate" their muscles after being depleted. Also don't cut out or lower fats too much because fats are extremely important, especially for female hormonal health, along with many other physiological processes so make sure not to make any drastic dietary changes when you start lifting weights.

Like I said, I am not an RD or nutrition coach so if you need more dietary guidance I would recommend seeking out a reputable RD or health professional who specializes in nutrition.

CARDIO RECOMMENDATIONS

As previously mentioned, cardiovascular health is important independent of your physique. Cardiovascular health generally gets associated with endless hours of walking on the treadmill with a steep incline. This can be very counterproductive for physique improvements and potentially even factors of overall health and well-being.

With that being said, the answer shouldn't be to only lift and do zero cardio. Three 30-minutes low intensity steady state (LISS), or keeping your heart rate between 105-130 beats per minute can provide a ton of benefits without eating into your strength gains and busy schedule. Ideally, cardio should be done after lifting weights to ensure you are entirely fresh when you are lifting weights. The actual modality of cardio doesn't actually matter as much as people tend to think. If you live in a climate which enables you to walk outside, getting some sunshine can be hit two birds with one stone for cardiovascular health.

As we will discuss in the next section, cardio can be integrated into a well-rounded warm-up routine.



WARM-UP

PURPOSE

The warm-up is a very important part of your workout. This is simply a way of elevating your heart rate and a way to start sweating. A proper warm-up shouldn't take that long, and it should, well...warm your body up. There are 2 main things a warm-up should do: elevate your body's core temperature and prime your body to lift heavy loads without getting injured. Warm-ups will significantly depend on the individual, but it's a good idea to start out doing the full routine, then only modifying it when you have a better sense of how your body works.

COMMON MISTAKES/MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT WARMING UP

Now that we know the intended purpose of a warm-up, let's look at some common mistakes and misconceptions. A warm-up is not a full cardio session.

While cardio can help to serve as a means of raising your body's core temperature, which is correlated with improved performance [21] you shouldn't be fatiguing yourself with excessive amounts of cardio.

Similarly with cardio, a warm-up for lifting isn't an entire yoga session. While mobility and flexibility are important for lifting, too much mobility (how much your joint can freely move) will increase your stability (how much you can resist joint movement). If your stability isn't adequately caught up to your mobility, you can be at an increased risk for injury. That isn't to say yoga itself is bad for lifting (in fact, it can be a great compliment to lifting), it just shouldn't be done right before a full weight lifting session. Additionally, a small amount of foam rolling, while painful, can give your body an acute increase in ROM [22].

HOW THIS WARM UP DIFFERS FROM “WARM-UP SETS”

Now that your body is both at an appropriate core temperature and your mobility is improved, you will move onto your warm-up sets. Warm-up sets differ from the rest of your warm-up, as these are actual sets of the given exercise, but you will be performing them with significantly lighter weight than your workout sets. This will give your body time to focus on keeping your form as clean as possible while also ensuring you aren't loading the muscle too quickly.



WARM UP PROTOCOL

WORKOUT	EXERCISE	SETS	REPS / TIME	NOTES
	LOW INTENSITY CARDIO	-	5-10 MINS	YOUR MACHINE OF CHOICE
LOWER WARM-UP	WALL-SIT	2	30 SEC	SIT AT PARALLEL
	FRONT/BACK LEG SWING	2	12	12 EACH LEG
	SIDE/SIDE LEG SWING	2	12	12 EACH LEG
	STANDING GLUTE SQUEEZE	2	30 SEC	SQUEEZE YOUR GLUTES AS HARD AS POSSIBLE
	LOW INTENSITY CARDIO	-	5-10 MINS	YOUR MACHINE OF CHOICE
UPPER BODY WARM-UP	PRONE TRAP RAISE	2	15	LIGHT WEIGHT
	CABLE EXTERNAL ROTATION	2	15	15 EACH SIDE
	OVERHEAD SHRUG	2	15	LIGHT WEIGHT OR NO WEIGHT



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CONTACT STEPHANIE

For customer support ONLY in regards to this training program, please email StephanieButtermore@gmail.com. Please only email me if you have training related questions. In regards to nutrition, I cannot answer questions beyond the scope of what I've already included in this program, as I am not a registered dietitian. Please reach out to an RD if you have nutrition questions.

As much as I love connecting with you on social media, I am not able to reliably respond to the questions received across platforms, so please direct any questions to the email above. Please allow for 3-5 business days for a reply.

Thank you so much for your support and good luck with the training!



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BEGINNER TO INTERMEDIATE

WOMEN'S FOUNDATIONS

PROGRAM

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